

# A Bank Robber's Failure.

By CHARLES A. LEWIS & QUINN.

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The attempt to rob the Second National bank of Grand Rapids was such a case of work, as looked upon from the street, and the failure was brought about in such a strange, original manner, that the story, as a whole, will interest you. A year before the robbery I was appointed night watchman at the bank. All kinds of importance have a day and a night watchman, though the one on duty is generally asleep, as a rule. I came on duty at 7 o'clock in the evening, and the very first thing to be done was to see that all doors and windows were secured. Then I began in the president's room with my broom and swept and dusted and put things to rights all through the place. This took about an hour. Just to the left of the cashier's window was a small fire and burglar proof safe, and I had to try the door of this to see if it locked.



At the rear of the building was the vault, enclosed by iron work extending from floor to ceiling. The door opening into the vault had a heavy lock, and the door of the vault itself, which was a steel cage about 12 by 12 in size, was provided with a lock supposed to be proof against the wiles of the most skillful burglar. Inside the vault were two large fire and burglar proof safes, and holding the cash and valuable papers, and using them doubly secured, with a well armed watchman ranging about, the bank officials did not worry about the

robbery. But there was still further protection. A burglar alarm connected with doors and windows, and a special wire ran from the bank to the police station. I was required to send in a signal over this wire every 30 minutes. The code of signals ran thus: One push on the button, "All is well"; two pushes, "I am ill"; three pushes, "Help wanted at once."

By 9 o'clock in the evening I was through with all my work, had sent in my signal and was seated in the president's room with a book in my hand. I would read until midnight. After sending in the signal I would fall asleep and sleep for exactly 30 minutes. When the 12:30 signal was sent in, I would awaken again until a minute to 1 o'clock. You may think this a bit odd, but I venture to say that night watchmen out of ten do the same thing. After I had firmly impressed it on my mind that I must wake up at a certain moment it was easy enough to do so. From 12 to 6 o'clock I had twelve 30 minute naps. Sometimes I awoke five seconds too soon, and sometimes five or six seconds past the 30 minutes, but I never varied over seven seconds at the furthest. My sleeping was not exactly a dereliction of duty, as the burglar alarm could be depended on to wake me up, and the signal at every half hour was proof that everything was all right in the bank.

About the time of my appointment the suit of rooms directly above the bank were vacated by a lawyer, and a dentist moved in. Before the bank would rent to him, he being a stranger, he had to secure recommendations and thoroughly identify himself. He claimed to be from St. Louis, and he produced letters from half a dozen well known residents of that city, all of which were afterward found to have been forged. The man gave his name as O. M. Hildebrand, and he fitted the rooms up very handsomely and was soon established in business. This fellow's real profession was burglary and bank robbery, and his real name was Ed Williams. He did not know one dental instrument from another, but hired a fresh graduate to do all the work which came to him. There were four rooms in the suit. The front room was the parlor, the second the operating room, the third a storeroom, and the fourth a bedroom. This bedroom was just above a small room at the rear end of the bank which was used as a cloak and washroom. In building the bank the ceiling of the first floor had been made secure by filling the space between the joists with brick. Over the vault there were plates of iron as a

protection.

Williams hired the rooms as part of a plan to rob the bank. There were three men in the plot, but the other two did not appear until the last moment. After occupying the rooms for nearly a year, doing business with the bank and making himself solid all around, he was ready to spring his trap. All his work was done in the daytime. He cut a hole in the floor of his bedroom and removed bricks and mortar until only a crust remained. It was slow work, and he had to exercise great care. He knew of the small room below, and he knew of the burglar alarm, the police wire and the half hour signals. He could not know of my habit of sleeping after midnight, though he probably suspected it. At any rate, at a quarter to 1 o'clock one October night the three burglars in the job broke through the crust of the ceiling, lowered themselves down by means of a rope, and at 10 minutes to 1 a strong hand clamped my throat, the muzzle of a revolver was placed in my temple, and I opened my eyes to see three men standing before me.

"Now, then," said Williams as he let go of my throat and stepped back, "let us understand each other. We have come to rob the bank. You cannot prevent it, and so you may as well save your shell from being cracked. We are going to bind and gag you, but unless you make a fool of yourself you will not be hurt. Do you agree?"

"I do," I replied. "You have got me down to rights, and it's no use to kick, but make up your mind that I don't answer any questions."

"We shall ask none," replied Williams as he proceeded to tie my hands and feet and insert a steady made gag. Just as the clock struck 1, he stepped over and pushed the button to signal the police that all was well. How he got onto the signal we never could understand, but he did it correctly, and then turned and said:

"Well, boys, it's off with our coats and go to work. Our first job is to get into the vault. Bring the watchman along so that we may keep an eye on him."

Two of them carried me along in my chair, and the third man saw to the bit of tools. They placed me to the left of the door, lighted two gas jets and began work on the lock of the iron partition. I had heard the bank officials do a great deal of bragging about this lock and fondly imagined the burglars would be delayed a good half hour by it. It was done for in about five minutes, and one of the burglars added insult to injury by observing that it was one of the simplest, cheapest locks he had ever seen used for such a purpose. The door of the vault proper was a different matter, however. It was a massive affair, the material chilled steel, and the locks were warranted burglar proof. There was a combination which had to be set at certain figures before a key could be introduced. When this key had turned the bolts half way, a second had to come into play. Each of the three men carefully examined the lock in turn, and then Williams queried, "Well, boys, what do you think of it?"

"We'll have to use the drill and a blast," replied one of them, and the other coincided with him.

At half past 1 o'clock the "All is well" signal was sent in, and the burglars began work. They used what is called a blacksmith's drill, the frame of which had been smuggled into the dentist's office and lowered down and put together. All of them seemed familiar with its working, and they had brought along no less than six different drills for the machine. Work was begun just under the lock, the men spelling each other at intervals of 10 minutes. When the 3 o'clock signal was sent in, they had made a very slight impression on the hard metal, but at half past 3 the signs were more encouraging. The fellows must have had the idea that when they got into the vault the money would be at hand, but after they had worked on the door for an hour a sudden thought occurred to Williams. He came over to me, removed the gag and asked:

"Is there a safe inside the vault?"

"I shall answer none of your questions."

"Well, ain't you? Perhaps you want a little thumping to humble you."

"If you want to thump, I can't help myself. I am here as a watchman of the bank. If I hadn't been asleep, you wouldn't have got in, and I'm not going to make matters worse by giving away any secrets."

"Well, odds is the difference whether there's a safe inside or not," he growled as he replaced the gag.

At 5 o'clock the trio were delighted with the progress of the work. At 8:30 they ceased drilling, blew a lot of powder into the hole and inserted a fuse, and pretty soon there was an explosion which tore a great piece out of the door, but did not burst it open. As a matter of fact, the force of the explosion threw the locks out of gear and made the job of opening it still more difficult. Upon this being discovered the fellows began to curse and growl and lament their luck. The two of them were for throwing up the job, but Williams demurred, and it was finally decided to continue work. They had brought down with them some bottled beer and sandwiches, and they fell to and had a bite and sent in the 4 o'clock alarm.

They did not use the drill again on the door, but on closer examination decided to blow it open. They had two powder canisters, each holding a pound. They debated as to how much they ought to use, but as it was getting to be morning and they were in a hurry they were reckless as to the quantity. I think the fellow who had the can-

ister pointed in at least half a pound. What they found was that the explosion was heard on the street. To begin the sound as much as possible they took up the carpet in the president's room, spread it apart and hung it over the two windows. There was fear that the concussion might set the burglar alarm to ringing, and so Williams cut the wire.

As the explosion to a clock all was ready. Williams placed the two other two picked up my chair to carry me into the president's room. All was to remain there until the explosion was over. Just what happened to bring about the premature explosion could never be learned, but the probability is that in his haste Williams cut the fuse too short. He was still kneeling at the door, and the three of us were back to it and about eight feet away when the mine was sprung. The force of the explosion was felt two blocks away. There was a pillar on the opposite side of the street at the moment, and the footmen appeared to lift up under his feet he thought it an explosion of some gas.

I cannot remember that I heard the explosion. I simply remember of being lifted up and hurled forward. The next thing I knew I was sitting up with a hand over either ear, and the room was in midnight darkness. I felt so stupid and dazed that it was many minutes before I could place myself. The gag was out of my mouth, and the room with which I had been bound to the chair was hanging loosely on my arms and legs. When I began to feel around to see where I was, I discovered that I was close to the wire gate by which all employees entered the bank inclosure. The door of the vault was almost on a line with this gate, but 60 feet away.

Between the gate and the vault were the compartments of bookkeeper, paying teller, receiving teller and discount clerk, each railed off with wood or wire.

You can judge of the strength of that blast when I tell you that everything in that 60 feet was leveled, the small safe blown over and the counters twisted like a rail fence. As soon as I realized the situation I groped for a match and lighted a gas jet, though the room was so full of powder smoke that it was some time before I could see a foot from my nose. I got to the police wire just in time to send in the 5 o'clock signal. I meant to send in the signal for help, but just as I touched the button I decided to wait a bit. When the smoke lifted so that I could get about, I lighted more gas and then looked for the burglars. One of them lay in a heap against the front door, a second under the counter near where I had picked myself up, and the third I could not find, though I knew he must be under the vault door, which had been blown off and lay on the floor.

The man at the front door was stone dead. The doctors said that his body must have swept down all the railings and partitions as he was hurled forward. The man under the counter began to show signs of life as I overhauled him, and thinking he might prove troublesome I tied him hand and foot. You will wonder that I was not severely hurt, but that was the chance of accident. The chair was completely wrecked, but I got off with three or four painful bruises. The man under the counter had his nose broken, two ribs fractured and received a bad scalp wound, but he had no sooner recovered consciousness than he began to struggle and curse. When I told him that both his partners were dead, he was awed to silence for awhile. Then he said to me:

"This has been a bad night's work, and I wish to heaven I had not been in the job. Have you sent in a police alarm yet?"

"No."

"You are a brave, level headed fellow. You have saved the bank from robbery, got two dead men here to exhibit, and I hope you will let me go. I promise you that I will lead an honest life from this time on."

"Odds is the difference to me whether you are honest or dishonest," I replied. "But I will make it an object to you. Let me go, and I will put \$500 in your hands within 24 hours."

"What? Only \$500 for a bank burglar on whom there may be a reward of \$2,000?"

"My good friend, I will make it \$1,000. You are a poor man, and \$1,000 will be a little fortune to you."

"Couldn't you raise it to \$2,000?" I asked, appearing to have my price.

"Two thousand! Two thousand!" he repeated. "If I do, my poor old mother may have to wait for bread, but being you are such a brave and sensible fellow I'll do it. Yes, I'll give \$2,000, and you shall have the money inside of two days. Hurry up and untie me, for it must be near daylight."

I stepped over to the police wire and sent in the signal, "Help wanted at once!" It had never been sent in before, nor have the words gone over that wire since. In five minutes there were four bluecoats knocking at the door, and when I let them in my prisoners greeted them with jeers and curses and swore he would get even with me if it took a hundred years.

Williams, as I have told you, was kneeling at the door when the explosion occurred. We found him under it, crushed and burned and bearing little resemblance to a human being. The one who was bound with his life was sent up for 12 years, and thus the trio were wiped out. I have an old scrapbook in which is pasted various newspaper articles speaking in my praise, but it's not much consolation to read them. The bank officials knew that I must have been asleep on duty, and instead of patting me on the back and raising my wages they waited about a month and then gave me the grand bonus. Perhaps I had better thank the burglar's \$2,000 and let him go. What do you think?

The examinations at a certain "prep" school were in progress. The boys were working busily over their papers, and the grim old professor was watching sharply from his desk. Presently he noticed that one of the students, a prominent member of the class, was consulting his watch with considerable frequency. The professor studied him in five minutes he had looked at the timepiece three times. This was enough for the guardian. He called the student to his desk and demanded the watch. It was given him, and he opened it. Across the face was a piece of paper bearing the legend "Faked." But the worthy professor was not to be easily deceived. He gave the student a

sharp, moving glance, turned the timepiece over and opened the back cover. It opened with considerable difficulty, and behold there was another slip of paper bearing the inscription, "Faked again, old fogey."—Boston Budget.

Amateur—I hear you are going on a gunning trip tomorrow, Breach. Would you mind if I went along with you? I have a great desire to learn how to gun. I never shot off a firearm in my life. Breach (freely)—All right, Amateur; meet me at the station tomorrow morning at half past 6.

Amateur (the next morning)—Breath, Breach! I didn't know it was going to be a masquerade affair.

Breach—It isn't. This is the costume I always wear when I take parties out gunning.—Puck.

Have and Cherchez. You never saw a post or a painter with large, coarse ears that stand out from the head like extended wings. That kind of an articular appendage betokens corpulence of mind. A long, narrow ear that lies flat to the head is a sign of pin-nacuity. Never trust a man with a thin, waferlike ear. He was born a hypocrite, if not a thief. A very small ear betokens a trifling mind, lacking decision. Ears set very high on the head indicate narrowness of mind. A large, well shaped ear that does not spread itself to the breeze is indicative of generosity. Most of the world's complexions had large ears and well developed noses. Although there are so many millions of people in the world, no two pairs of ears are alike. Each has a marked individuality.—New York Recorder.

Disputed Ownership. First Business Man (in a big hurry)—Beg pardon, sir, but that's my boy! Second Business Man—He may be your boy, but he's my waiter.—Harper's Weekly.

Very Likely. J. E. Sullivan, secretary of the Amateur Athletic union, president of the Pastime Athletic club and athletic editor of The Sporting Times, writes: "For years I have been actively connected with athletic sports. I always found it to my advantage to use Allcock's Porous Plasters while in training, as they quickly remove soreness and stiffness; and when attacked with any kind of pain, the result of night colds, I always used Allcock's with beneficial results. I have noticed that most athletes of the present day use nothing else but Allcock's plasters."

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